United Nations

Report of the Committee on Information

General Assembly

Official Records • Fifty-first Session
Supplement No.21 (A/51/21)

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NOTE

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly;"

and requested the Committee on Information and the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

2. At its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly, in resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the report of the Committee and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group, 1/ reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in Assembly resolution 34/182, and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67. The Committee on Information agreed, at its organizational session in 1980, that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. At its thirty-sixth to forty-ninth sessions, the General Assembly again expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the reports of the Committee 2/ and its recommendations, and reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in resolution 34/182 (General Assembly resolutions 36/149 B, 37/94 B, 38/82 B, 39/98 A, 40/164 A, 41/68 A, 42/162, 43/60, 44/50, 45/76, 46/73 B, 47/73 B, 48/44 B and 49/38 B. At its fiftieth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee 3/ and adopted its consensus recommendations as contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/31 A and B. The Assembly also requested the Committee to report to it at its fifty-first session.

4. At its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly appointed two new members of the Committee, namely China and Mexico; at its forty-first session the Assembly appointed Malta a member of the Committee; at its forty-third session, it appointed Hungary, Ireland and Zimbabwe; and at its forty-fourth session it appointed Nepal.

5. At its forty-fifth session, the Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 74 to 78 members, and appointed Czechoslovakia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica and Uruguay members of the Committee. The Assembly also decided to appoint the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic a member of the Committee, with immediate effect, to fill the vacancy left by the German Democratic Republic.

6. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 78 to 79 members and appointed Burkina Faso a member of the Committee.

7. At its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 79 to 81 and appointed the Republic of Korea and Senegal members of the Committee.

8. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 81 to 83 and appointed Gabon and Israel members of the Committee.

9. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly decided on the recommendation of the Committee to increase the membership of the Committee from 83 to 88 members and appointed Belize, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Kazakstan and South Africa members of the Committee.

10. At its fiftieth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 88 to 89 and appointed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea a member of the Committee.

11. The Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria
Argentina
Bangladesh
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Gabon
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakstan
Kenya
Lebanon
Malta
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Korea
Romania
Russian Federation
Senegal
Singapore
Slovakia
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan

Syrian Arab Republic
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America

Uruguay
Venezuela
Viet Nam
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zaire
Zimbabwe

II. ORGANIZATIONAL QUESTIONS

A. Opening of the session

12. The organizational meeting of the eighteenth session of the Committee was held at United Nations Headquarters on 6 May 1996. The session was opened by the Chairman, Mr. Ivan Maximov (Bulgaria). Two Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur were elected to fill unexpired terms on the Extended Bureau for 1995-1996.

13. World Press Freedom Day (3 May) was commemorated at the meeting. The President of the General Assembly, Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral, gave a statement, which was followed by a minute of silence in honour of all slain journalists from around the world. The Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information, Mr. Samir Sanbar, read the message of the Secretary-General and made his own statement. The Chairman, Mr. Ivan Maximov, also addressed the Committee on the occasion of the day. Subsequently, the Chairman made an introductory statement and the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information delivered his address on the progress achieved in the work of the Department of Public Information pertaining to the agenda items under consideration (see annexes I and II).

B. Election of officers

14. To fill the posts vacated by elected members of the Bureau, and in accordance with the principle of geographic rotation, the Committee elected the following officers to serve until the end of the period 1995-1996, as follows:

Vice-Chairmen: Mr. Holger Martinsen (Argentina)
Mr. Salman Abbasy (Pakistan)

Rapporteur: Mr. Nacerdine Sai (Algeria)

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

15. At its organizational meeting, the Committee adopted, without objection, the following agenda and programme of work (A/AC.198/1996/1):

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
4. Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day.
5. Statement by the Chairman.
6. Statement by the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information.
7. General debate and consideration of substantive questions:
   (a) Continuation of the examination of United Nations public information policies and activities in the light of the evolution of international relations, and of the need to establish the new

international economic order and the new world information and communication order;

(b) Evaluation and follow-up of the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;

(c) Promotion of the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information;

8. Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

16. The Committee held the substantive meetings of its eighteenth session at United Nations Headquarters from 6 to 17 May 1996.

17. For consideration of item 7, the Committee had before it the reports of the Secretary-General on the United Nations information centres in 1995: allocation of resources from the regular budget of the United Nations (A/AC.198/1996/2) and on the review of publications by the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/1996/3). Also before the Committee was a report entitled "Activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee" (A/AC.198/1996/CRP.1), prepared by its secretariat.

18. In the context of cooperation within the United Nations system, the Chairman of the Committee brought to the attention of the membership General Assembly resolution 50/130 of 20 December 1995, entitled "Communication for development programmes in the United Nations system", and called upon the Committee to address this important issue in the course of its deliberations.

D. Observers

19. The following Member States took part in the session as observers: Albania, Australia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg and Sweden.

20. Representatives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), The European Union, the League of Arab States and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) also attended.

E. Other matters

21. The Committee decided to conduct further informal consultations through the Bureau, the spokespersons of the regional groups, the Group of 77 and China.

III. GENERAL DEBATE AND CONSIDERATION OF SUBSTANTIVE QUESTIONS

22. Statements during the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee: Algeria, Argentina, Belarus, Benin, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burundi, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica (on behalf of the Group of 77), Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Italy (on behalf of the European Union), Jamaica (on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community), Japan, Jordan, Morocco, Nepal, the Netherlands (on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States), Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Romania, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Ukraine, Uruguay, the United States of America, Venezuela and Yemen. A statement was also made by the observer of Kyrgyzstan. The session was addressed by the Assistant Director-General of UNESCO for Communication, Information and Informatics and by a representative of the Department of Public Information.

23. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, all speakers said that the world - and the United Nations - at the end of the twentieth century faced many new challenges. It was a time to take stock and to reassess, with a view to utilizing new opportunities to work for the common good. The awesome role of information as a tool not only for positive change, but also for negative propaganda, was underscored by many delegations. Today's communications revolution, by making instantaneous dissemination possible to every corner of the globe, was serving to reinforce the power of information in all societies. Since information was one of the most important means for political, economic and social development, many cautioned that it must be used wisely and responsibly. Information must be accurate, objective and respectful of cultural diversity, according to a number of speakers, and in this connection, several suggested an international code of conduct relating to flows of information.

24. All speakers addressed the deep significance of the commemoration of World Press Freedom Day and the important values it enshrined. The freedom of information was a fundamental freedom to be cherished as the cornerstone of all other freedoms. All speakers said that journalists should be able to work without fear of intimidation, imprisonment, violence or death in the pursuit of their lawful duty to keep the world informed. One speaker said that in 1995 a record number of 182 journalists were in prison. Another informed the Committee that 20 journalists had been killed since the beginning of 1996. In his words, when journalists were killed, "the first casualty was the truth", and he believed they should be given the same protection afforded to soldiers and diplomats. One speaker paid tribute to the staff member of the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) in Algiers who had been brutally killed. Another speaker noted that journalists had an added responsibility to exercise a strong sense of judgement and objectivity in their profession to contribute to the promotion of democratic principles and foster social and economic development.

25. The representative of UNESCO said that with the emergence of a new world order, the General Conference of UNESCO in November 1989 had adopted a new strategy characterized by support for the free flow of information, wider and better balanced dissemination of information and the strengthening of communications capacities in developing countries. He also said that the UNESCO General Conference had proposed the organization of a press seminar in Europe in 1997. The work being done by UNESCO could be described in two words:

"democracy and development". In this connection, taking note, among other things, of General Assembly resolution 50/130 on communication for development programmes in the United Nations system, UNESCO was organizing the sixth Round Table of Specialized Agencies engaged in communication for development, to be held at Harare, Zimbabwe in the second half of 1996.

26. A number of speakers pointed to the continuing importance of a new world information and communication order, which was in their view even more relevant in today's increasingly high-technology world. They cautioned that many people in the global village would be further marginalized and existing disparities worsened by lack of access to technological innovations. Several speakers underscored that 75 per cent of the mass media was controlled by the developed countries. One speaker suggested that the views of Member States on ways and means of improving communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries should still be sought and suggested extending the deadline for these responses.

27. Many speakers in the general debate expressed their support for the regional seminars on promoting pluralistic and independent media arranged by the Department of Public Information in cooperation with UNESCO. In this connection, the speaker from the Department gave details on the recent Sana'a seminar, as well as on the financing of the seminars previously held. One speaker expressed his gratitude for the holding of the Sana'a seminar in his country and spoke of its positive impact. A number of speakers supported the initiative made by UNESCO on the holding of a similar seminar for the States of Central and Eastern Europe in Bulgaria in 1997 and requested the support of the Department of Public Information. Several delegations also praised the Department's training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries, as well as last year's programme for Palestinian media practitioners. Similarly, a few delegations said the journalists' encounter being planned for Gaza later in 1996 was a very positive project, and called generally for more programmes for Palestinian journalists.

28. One delegation protested the violation of its national sovereignty and international conventions in the form of the large number of weekly radio and television programmes that another country was directing specifically against his country, which he considered a case of aggression. That country was even planning to increase the power of its transmissions and to make frequency changes - a plan which the speaker denounced - in an attempt to reach its objectives of manipulation and subversion. He warned of possible consequences of those actions.

29. In addressing the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, all agreed that the grave financial crisis facing the Organization was inducing a fundamental and necessary restructuring of its operations. One speaker on behalf of a large group said that reform and restructuring in the United Nations, as well as the communications revolution which was reaching into "our homes, workplaces and the most intimate realms of life", would form the backdrop for the deliberations of the session. She pointed to the necessity of positive negotiation, constructive endeavours and joint responsibility. A number of speakers said that the spirit of consensus which had prevailed in the Committee in recent times must continue, as the current complicated times required dialogue, not confrontation. One speaker on behalf of another large group said that he was pleased by the work of the Extended Bureau and was confident that this collaboration would be strengthened in the future to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department of Public Information.

30. All delegations agreed that it was increasingly important that the public information function be further strengthened in order for the purposes of the United Nations to be fully understood and support for its work garnered. One speaker pointed to the important meeting of 185 Heads of State or Government, who had given expression to the new times in which the United Nations was operating and the new demands being placed on it. Five high-level working groups were embarking upon different aspects of reform and restructuring. The current financial situation of the Organization, in the view of a number of speakers, could lead to rethinking and restructuring, which could lead to positive efficiency measures. The Department of Public Information had the daunting task of bringing the message of the United Nations to the world in a climate of reduced financial resources and many competing information priorities. Furthermore, all speakers agreed that it was vital to counteract negative perceptions about the United Nations so prevalent in many minds today. One speaker characterized the Organization as "under siege" by critics who declared it had outlived is usefulness. Another delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, said that what was needed was an aggressive "marketing" strategy to combat mistrust and misinformation in connection with the public perception of the Organization. After all, a number of speakers suggested, the Organization was as good as its Member States made it. One delegation suggested that States should not make political pronouncements that undermined this very Organization where they exercised leadership. Some countries, the speaker said, created the impression that the United Nations was a drain on their finances. He suggested rather that the Organization in one way or the other benefited everyone, and it was important that the world community be sensitized to those benefits. In this connection, several speakers commended the factual updates that the Department of Public Information was producing to counteract negative publicity, such as "Setting the Record Straight" and others.

31. Speakers expressed their sincere appreciation to the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information, Mr. Samir Sanbar, for his wide-ranging and informative statement and for his - as some said, "impressive" - innovations in the Department. Others said that his approach to public information set the stage for an open and frank dialogue on the present and the future of the Department and for increased transparency. Many paid tribute to his hard work and his clear vision at a difficult time, and in the words of one speaker his "dedication" helped to compensate for the cutbacks in resources. One speaker said that his country would make every effort to ensure that the Department of Public Information had the tools and resources to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, but hard choices had to be made about where to allocate funds. The same speaker said that priorities must be set to maintain or increase resources where they could do the most and to reduce or cut where least needed. The same feeling was echoed by several speakers. Many delegations underscored the importance of financing the Department of Public Information at a level commensurate with its important role in the life of the Organization, as the success of the United Nations depended on people being informed and support for its activities being generated.

32. All speakers expressed their appreciation also to the staff of the Department, often in the context of the extraordinary level of activities undertaken for the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. One speaker said that it was particularly appropriate to take stock after that milestone year of the Department's abilities in getting the message out. One delegation said that the Department should be more assertive in its information campaigns and should anticipate, rather than merely "react". One speaker visualized the Department's work as concentrating on two areas - the "accumulation" of material and new ideas, such as through the holding of international art and photography

exhibitions, as well as the interactive realm of feedback from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and citizens worldwide through electronic and other means. One delegation reflected its concern about the fiscal impact of mandates originating outside the Committee on Information and, accordingly, supported a provision in the draft resolution addressing this problem.

33. The majority of speakers were supportive of the Department's strategy of strengthening partnerships, especially with the media. A number of speakers were supportive of its links with other departments, as well as its collaborative efforts with other agencies and programmes of the system through the Joint United Nations Information Committee. Its cooperation with the Department of Peace-keeping Activities and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in peace-keeping and with UNESCO in the regional media seminars was singled out as noteworthy by a number of speakers.

34. All speakers expressed their strong support and approval for the Department's pioneering efforts in harnessing new information technologies in pursuit of its mandate. They pointed to the increasing dissemination of information materials through electronic means such as the Internet and CD-ROM as an important means for the Department to communicate with its targeted audiences and to maximize its output. As one speaker said, in the worldwide race to transmit information, the Department had to be "competent and competitive". One speaker said that the Department must keep the Committee informed as to what technologies existed, ways and means to improve utilization of those technologies and its plan for their future implementation. Several speakers said that the Department should continue to be a leader in this area, while another voiced the opinion that there had to be a balance of priorities, believing that a focus on technology to the detriment of the human aspects of the United Nations goals should be avoided. Many speakers echoed the belief that the fastest possible supply to end-users should be the primary goal of the activities of the Department. However, it was important in the view of a number of speakers to remain keenly aware of the differing global capacities to accommodate electronic information and to respond appropriately. In this connection, a number of speakers said that it should be remembered that print would remain the essential medium for the developing world for the foreseeable future. Several speakers applauded the United Nations Home Page on the World Wide Web and were pleased with the posting of the daily highlights, briefings and press releases. Several delegations, however, regretted delays in the availability of electronic information. In this connection, one speaker said that he had noted that the latest Security Council documents available on the Internet were extremely out of date.

35. A number of speakers pointed to the valuable service provided to journalists by the Office of the Spokesman of the Secretary-General. Many also voiced their strong appreciation for the press releases issued by the Department, which were of particular value to the smaller missions. Several speakers characterized the releases as of "a good quality". Another speaker on behalf of a large group underscored the necessity to continue their publication on all meetings in both working languages and to ensure their timely dissemination, in particular through the use of modern technology. One speaker said that the production of press releases in the two working languages of the United Nations should not suffer from the financial crisis, believing that French speakers had the right to demand access to information, also making the point that the "daily highlights" should be translated the same day into French and posted on the Internet, as was the case for the highlights in English. He also said that at least a summary of the noon briefing in French should be made available.

36. Most speakers pointed to the important role played by the publications of the Department in transmitting the message of the United Nations. One speaker said that in his view, presentation, conciseness and accuracy were of paramount importance. He believed that there had been recent errors of fact in some of the fiftieth anniversary materials. One delegation said that in informational materials the term "the former Yugoslavia" should be used carefully, as it had only a selective geographical, rather than political, connotation. Many Committee members singled out certain publications for praise, including the Blue Books series, the Yearbook, the Chronicle, and the World Media Handbook. However, several speakers said that publications must have an identifiable need and be cost-effective and urged regular reviews to see if those criteria were being met. One delegation spoke of the importance of maximizing the commercial potential of publications and audiovisual products of the Department. On the other hand, several others cautioned that financial considerations should not deter the Department from the fulfilment of its mandate, which was the widest possible dissemination of its materials. One speaker said that the availability of information materials in the Russian language was limited, although UNIC Moscow had intensified efforts to publish in Russian by, among other things, recruiting co-sponsors. Speakers expressed their wish for the Blue Books to be produced in Arabic and French. One speaker regretted in general that publications in Arabic were being cut back and hoped that that situation would be rectified. Another speaker from the same region said that the Department had a responsibility to promote multilingualism in its publications, which he viewed as a very practical obligation in view of the diversity of the world represented by the United Nations.

37. A number of speakers pointed to the importance of disseminating the United Nations message through radio, which was a cost-effective and far-reaching medium. One speaker characterized radio as a voice through which the Organization "could plead the case of multilateralism". One delegation said that there had been great progress in the Department's radio and television output and that in particular the quality of broadcasts to the African continent were improved. Several speakers pointed to the value of the electronic radio bulletin board. Another speaker referred to the agreement between the Department and a national organization in his country to facilitate broadcasts on radio stations in Brazil and other Portuguese-speaking countries and looked forward to the strengthening of the Department's broadcasting in Portuguese. Another was appreciative of the work of the Caribbean radio unit. On the other hand, one delegation expressed surprise that there was no staff member responsible for broadcasting to the Middle East, which he viewed as particularly important in connection with the peace process. One delegation suggested that the history of the United Nations should be a focus and favoured the production of documentary dramas, perhaps in cooperation with outside collaborators.

38. Many speakers pointed to the important twin platforms - agendas for peace and development - which were inextricably linked and should be accorded equal priority in the thematic work of the Department. All delegations strongly supported the work of the Department at the earliest stages of peace-keeping missions and were gratified to see that an effective public-information capacity for operations was beginning to be put into practice. They viewed the information component as critical to the success of these missions, particularly in regard to targeting the local population in the areas of operations, as well as the public in troop-contributing countries. Several called for the establishment of radio stations run by the Department in countries where United Nations peace-keeping operations were established, wherever feasible. Several speakers noted with appreciation the interdepartmental working group on media strategies for peace-keeping operations and other field operations. One speaker

looked forward to the third edition of Blue Helmets and suggested that the names of all those peace-keepers who had laid down their lives in the performance of their duties should be reflected in that publication.

39. A number of speakers were encouraged by the important work of the Department in the area of communication for development, and appreciated its work for the current cycle of world conferences, including the World Social Summit and the Fourth International Women's Conference in Beijing. One speaker noted that Development Update was a valuable publication on the planning and outcome of these United Nations conferences and other topical issues in the development field. Some speakers said that publications on development must get the attention they deserved and in this connection expressed regret at the demise of Development Forum and called for its resumption. Several delegations underlined the importance of dissemination of information on sustainable socio-economic development for countries in transition. In this connection, one delegation said that it would be beneficial for materials on these topics to be issued in languages spoken by the local population in these countries. Several speakers expressed satisfaction with the Department's work in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). Some delegations believed that the Department should focus greater attention on producing information on economic development. One speaker urged more attention to the eradication of poverty, without which there would be no development for many peoples. As 1996 was the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, he believed that this would provide an opportunity for the Department to place more emphasis on this important subject. One speaker said that sustainable development held the key to global peace. Several speakers pointed to the priority they placed on the ongoing programme of activities of the Department aimed at the African continent, highlighting especially the United Nations system-wide Special Initiative on Africa. It was important in their view to make known the needs of Africa and the progress being made in order to correct the erroneous image of the continent; in this connection, several delegations noted the important work of the publication Africa Recovery. Several speakers expressed their appreciation for the work of the Department of Public Information on the Middle East and the question of Palestine.

40. A number of speakers pointed to the series of activities carried out for the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster and thanked the Department for its efforts, calling for the continuation of activities to raise awareness of this planetary calamity and issues of nuclear safety.

41. In the general debate, many delegations offered opinions and suggestions on the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the network of United Nations information centres, both of which they believed to be rich sources of information on the Organization, unique outreach tools and vital components for promoting global awareness about the United Nations. Several believed that the level of resources allotted to the Library were inadequate, which had led to a drop in services, and hoped that the Library would receive the required funds commensurate with the importance of library services. One speaker on behalf of a large group said that in his view the Dag Hammarskjöld Library was not yet - despite recent efforts - operating at the highest standards of accepted library practice and believed that new technologies would be particularly useful. He called for a full evaluation of the operations and staffing of the Library. Because tremendous advances in information technologies had radically changed the way libraries "do business", the speaker, on behalf of a group, suggested that the Department arrange for a review of the operation of the Library by a library specialist who should also formulate recommendations relating to the latest information technologies. This call was echoed by another speaker, who

added that the objective was, in his delegation's opinion, to ultimately save scarce funds and increase the capability of the Library to reach its user-base effectively. Several other delegations suggested that automation could be further improved, although they were dubious about the value of entrusting the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to outside entities.

42. All speakers pointed to the important work being done in the United Nations information centres, and many stressed their especially vital role in the developing countries. Some delegations characterized the centres as the Organization's "display window" to the world, which in many countries represented the only point of contact with United Nations activities and publications. One speaker said that in his view they represented a United Nations presence around the world in times of peace, not just in times of conflict. One speaker said that they should become models of high technology for resource-starved peoples in some countries of the world, believing greater emphasis should be placed upon equipment, rather than personnel alone. One delegation on behalf of a large group said that the technological revolution would have an effect on the information centres, especially in the developed world. He emphasized that distance now placed diminished restrictions on the dissemination of information, and the fact that the number of depository libraries and NGOs had increased in importance. He requested a thorough evaluation of the objectives, mandate and accomplishments of the information centres, the results of which should be shared with the Committee. This proposal was also supported by another speaker, who emphasized that his delegation was fully aware that information centres in the developing world remained a vital means of information dissemination. The evaluation should give ample emphasis to the centres in the developed world. Many speakers encouraged centres to continue their new levels of information activities initiated over the last years and called upon them to develop innovative means to reach out to the public.

43. While a number of speakers supported the process of integration, as it ensured a unified approach, enhanced efficiency as well as economies through sharing, some at the same time cautioned on the need for the UNICs to retain their functional autonomy in those countries where it was necessary to integrate them with other United Nations field offices. A few speakers expressed reservations about the whole integration exercise. One speaker said that he was an advocate of keeping the information centres as autonomous entities. Another spoke of his concern that the information functions would atrophy in the process and believed that centres needed to be headed by information professionals. All agreed that integration should be approached on a case-by-case basis and always in consultation with the host Government. One speaker said that he would appreciate a study of the results of the outreach programmes of the information centres in the form of a breakdown by types of users, with the rationale of improving services rather than providing an excuse for cuts. Another delegation suggested a report which would include the achievements of the integrated centres in terms of the achievement of their established goals. Many speakers expressed their concern that cuts in the centres would be very ill timed and could destroy achievements when a well-informed public was vital to the work of the United Nations. Any perceived inefficiencies should not be allowed to undermine this important system, in the opinion of several speakers. Most speakers were well aware of the need for cost-effectiveness, but believed that the system of information centres must be maintained and that the financial ills of the Organization should not serve as a pretext for attacking the existence of the UNICs.

44. Speakers singled out for commendation the work of specific centres in their countries and regions, including UNICs in Accra, Moscow, Islamabad, Kathmandu, Bucharest, Port of Spain and Tokyo. One delegation said that it was appreciative of the reactivation of the centre in Tehran, although its functions should continue to be further enhanced. One speaker said that his Government would increase voluntary funds by 50 per cent to make additional resources available to the information centre. Another speaker regretted the recall of the UNIC Director in his country several years ago. He said that the obligation of the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) did not allow him enough time to fulfil his informational role and, accordingly, his Government was willing to strengthen its cooperation with the information centre. In reference to one centre, a speaker said that, while it was developing quite successfully, the growing requirements called for more posts. Another speaker said that the centre in Burkina Faso "had suffered" and must be reactivated. One delegation suggested providing one post at the United Nations Information Service in Vienna to serve the needs of Croatia. Another said that it was seeking a resource centre in Bratislava, while one speaker called for a regional centre for Central Asia in Bishkek. One speaker said that his country wished to have an information component in the UNDP office in Sofia. A centre in Amman was called for by one delegation.

45. A number of speakers considered the guided tour operation of the Department a key means of outreach to the public, which offered a very immediate and personal view of the work of the Organization. Tours were seen as an important means of fostering understanding through direct contact between the United Nations and the peoples of the world. It was therefore important, in the view of several delegations, that tours be offered in as many languages as possible and that they be allowed as broad an access as possible to United Nations premises. One delegation said that the tours were a particularly important means of outreach because they were taken largely by young people and children, who would be the future shapers of the next century. Several speakers regretted that financial cutbacks prevented the updating of the tour route and called for this to be done as soon as feasible.

46. At the end of the general debate, the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information thanked all delegations for the strong support that he and his staff had received from them. He assured the Committee that he had listened carefully to their constructive comments and would be guided by their wise counsel in the pursuit of the Department's new information strategy. He looked forward to continuing his intersessional consultations with the Bureau of the Committee in a spirit of open and honest dialogue to further improve the work of the Department. He emphasized that no progress could be achieved without close collaboration and mutual confidence between the Department and the Committee.

IV. PREPARATION AND ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS FIFTY-FIRST SESSION

47. At the 9th meeting of the Committee, on 17 May 1996, the Rapporteur introduced the draft report of the Committee on its eighteenth session. Statements were made by the representatives of Jamaica (on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community), Belarus, the Netherlands (on behalf of the Western European and Other States Group), Costa Rica (on behalf of the Group of 77), the Islamic Republic of Iran, Côte d'Ivoire and Egypt. The Committee decided by consensus to recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the report including the following draft resolutions, as orally amended.

Draft resolution A

Information in service of humanity

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the comprehensive and important report of the Committee on Information, 4/

Also taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information,

Urges all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned, reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, deeply concerned by the disparities existing between developed and developing countries and the consequences of every kind arising from those disparities that affect the capability of the public, private or other media and individuals in developing countries to disseminate information and communicate their views and their cultural and ethical values through endogenous cultural production, as well as to ensure the diversity of sources and their free access to information, and recognizing the call in this context for what in the United Nations and at various international forums has been termed "a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process":

(a) To cooperate and interact with a view to reducing existing disparities in information flows at all levels by increasing assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, with due regard for their needs and the priorities attached to such areas by those countries, and in order to enable them and the public, private or other media in developing countries to develop their own information and communication policies freely and independently and increase the participation of media and individuals in the communication process, and to ensure a free flow of information at all levels;

(b) To ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and condemn resolutely all attacks against them;

(c) To provide support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from public, private and other media in developing countries;

(d) To enhance regional efforts and cooperation among developing countries, as well as cooperation between developed and developing countries, to strengthen communication capacities and to improve the media infrastructure and communication technology in the developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information;

(e) To aim, in addition to bilateral cooperation, at providing all possible support and assistance to the developing countries and their media, public, private or other, with due regard to their interests and needs in the field of information and to action already adopted within the United Nations system, including:

(i) The development of the human and technical resources that are indispensable for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries and support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes, such as those already operating under both public and private auspices throughout the developing world;

(ii) The creation of conditions that will enable developing countries and their media, public, private or other, to have, by using their national and regional resources, the communication technology suited to their national needs, as well as the necessary programme material, especially for radio and television broadcasting;

(iii) Assistance in establishing and promoting telecommunication links at the subregional, regional and interregional levels, especially among developing countries;

(iv) The facilitation, as appropriate, of access by the developing countries to advanced communication technology available on the open market;

(f) To provide full support for the International Programme for the Development of Communication 5/ of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which should support both public and private media.

Draft resolution B

United Nations public information policies and activities

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming its primary role in elaborating, coordinating and harmonizing United Nations policies and activities in the field of information,

Also reaffirming that the Secretary-General should ensure that the activities of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, as the focal point of the public information tasks of the United Nations, are strengthened and improved, keeping in view the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the priority areas defined by the General Assembly and the recommendations of the Committee on Information,

Taking note of all the reports of the Secretary-General submitted to the Committee on Information,

Encouraging the Secretary-General to develop a concrete plan to continue to enhance the public image of the United Nations,

1. Welcomes the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to membership of the Committee;

2. Recalls its decision to consolidate the role of the Committee on Information as its main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations relating to the work of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat;

3. Calls upon the Secretary-General, in respect of the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 2 of General Assembly resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993;

4. Takes note of the reductions of the resources allocated to the Department of Public Information, expresses its concern about the proposals of the Secretary-General on further reductions of the Department's budget which might negatively affect the activities mandated by the General Assembly, and requests the Secretary-General to support the Department of Public Information, in accordance with section II, paragraph 6, of General Assembly resolution 50/214 of 23 December 1995;

5. Also takes note of the efforts of the Secretary-General to put into practice the need for an effective public information capacity of the Department of Public Information for the formation and day-to-day functioning of the information components of peace-keeping and other field operations of the United Nations, and requests the Secretariat to continue to ensure the involvement of the Department at the planning stage of such future operations through interdepartmental consultations and coordination with the other substantive departments of the Secretariat;

6. Requests the management of the Department of Public Information to review the Department's publications and proposals for publications to ensure that all publications fulfil an identifiable need, that they do not duplicate other publications inside or outside the United Nations system and that they are produced in a cost-effective manner, and to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session;

7. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General regarding the review of major publications of the Department of Public Information, 6/ and urges all efforts to ensure timely production and dissemination of its major publications, in particular the United Nations Chronicle, the Yearbook of the United Nations, the World Media Handbook, and Africa Recovery, maintaining consistent editorial independence and accuracy, taking the necessary measures to ensure that they contain adequate, objective and equitable information about issues before the Organization and reflecting divergent opinions where they occur;

8. Requests the Secretary-General to conduct a review of existing publications produced and disseminated by the Department of Public Information in the sphere of development and to renew his efforts to improve existing publications or explore the possibility of alternative publications, in a manner in which such publications respond to the development-related information needs of people, in accordance with the requirements that the publications fulfil an identifiable need, that they do not duplicate other publications inside or outside the United Nations system and that they are produced in a cost-effective manner;

9. Reaffirms the importance attached by Member States to the role of United Nations information centres in effectively and comprehensively disseminating information in all parts of the world, particularly in developing countries and countries in transition, and especially in those countries where there is a need for greater understanding about United Nations activities;

10. Reaffirms also that the United Nations information centres meet the primary objectives outlined by the Committee in its report to the General Assembly at its forty-second session; 7/

11. Recalls the report of the Secretary-General on the results of the trial of integrating United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations system in general, 8/ and requests the Secretary-General to continue the integration exercise in a cost-effective manner and whenever feasible, on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host country and ensuring that the information functions and the autonomy of the United Nations information centres are not adversely affected and to report thereon to the Committee on Information;

12. Welcomes the action by some Member States with regard to financial and material support to United Nations information centres in their respective capitals, and invites the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to consult Member States, where appropriate, on the possibility of providing the centres with additional voluntary support on a national basis;

13. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on the allocation of resources to United Nations information centres in 1995, 9/ and calls upon him to continue to study ways and means to rationalize and effect equitable disbursement of available resources to all United Nations information centres;

14. Also takes note of the important impact on the functioning and the fulfilment of the objectives of some of the United Nations information centres of the development of new technologies such as the Internet and CD-ROMs and their effect upon the dissemination of information, the increase in the number of United Nations depository libraries in some Member States and the increased importance of all concerned actors of the international community in their cooperation with the Organization;

15. Requests, the Secretary-General therefore to submit a report to the Committee on Information for its consideration at its nineteenth session on the United Nations information centres, in particular, on added value, efficiency, cost-effectiveness and avoidance of duplication, especially in the areas of new technologies, with a view to offering recommendations on the review, strengthening and rationalization of their activities;

16. Reaffirms the role of the General Assembly in relation to the opening of new United Nations information centres, and invites the Secretary-General to make such recommendations as he may judge necessary regarding the establishment and location of these centres;

17. Recognizes the continued enhanced cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the University for Peace in Costa Rica as a focal point for promoting United Nations activities and disseminating United Nations information materials;

18. Takes note of the requests of Bulgaria, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan and Slovakia for information centres or information components;

19. Requests the Secretary-General to conduct an evaluation, within existing resources and without detriment to mandated programmes and activities, through the services of an independent consultant selected after an open and transparent selection process, of the functioning of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, covering, inter alia, its infrastructure, operations, staffing and budgetary situation, with a view to improving all its services and taking advantage of new, cost-effective automated and electronic library information and communication technologies and services and taking into account previous studies on the subject, and to submit a report to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session;

20. Expresses its full support for the wide and prompt coverage of United Nations activities through a continuation of United Nations press releases in both working languages of the Secretariat, namely, English and French, and stresses the importance of the continued speedy issue and high quality of those press releases in both working languages;

21. Encourages the Secretary-General to explore ways and means to improve the access of United Nations radio to airwaves worldwide, bearing in mind that radio is one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching media available to the Department of Public Information and is an important instrument in United Nations activities, such as development and peace-keeping, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993;

22. Underlines the continued importance for the Department of Public Information of using traditional and mass media channels in disseminating information on the United Nations, and encourages the Department of Public Information to take full advantage of recent developments in information technologies, such as the Internet and CD-ROM, in order to improve in a cost-effective, comprehensive and timely manner the dissemination of information on the United Nations, taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Organization;

23. Commends the Department of Public Information for the important role it played in responding to the increased public interest resulting from the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations;

24. Requests the Department of Public Information to continue to ensure the greatest possible access for United Nations guided tours, as well as to ensure that displays in public areas are kept as informative, up to date and relevant as possible;

25. Invites Member States and relevant international organizations to submit to the Secretary-General by 15 March 1997 their observations and suggestions on ways and means of furthering the development of communications infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, and requests the Secretary-General to submit a report thereon to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session;

26. Recommends, in order to continue to facilitate contact between the Department of Public Information and the Committee on Information between sessions, that the Bureau of the Committee together with representatives of each regional group, the Group of 77 and China, in close contact with the members of the Committee, should continue to meet on a regular basis and consult at periodic intervals with representatives of the Department;

27. Takes note of the contribution made by Member States, in cooperation with the Department of Public Information and the Special United Nations Coordinator for International Cooperation on Chernobyl, to information activities for the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, and recalls its resolutions concerning the consequences of the above-mentioned disaster, in particular, resolutions 50/31 B of 6 December 1995 and 50/134 of 20 December 1995, encouraging the regular exchange of information with the countries concerned, the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, with a view to enhancing world public awareness of the consequences of such disasters;

28. Recognizes the positive role of regional seminars held at Windhoek, Santiago, Almaty and Sana'a for the promotion of independent and pluralistic media, takes note of the invitation of the twenty-eighth General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in its resolution 4/6 of 15 November 1995, to cooperate with the Director-General of the Organization in the preparation and organization of a similar regional seminar in 1997 in Central and Eastern Europe, depending on availability of funding, also takes note of the offer of the Government of Bulgaria to host such a seminar, and invites the Department of Public Information to provide the requested assistance in jointly mobilizing the support of various other voluntary funding sources;

29. Requests that the Department of Public Information be provided with an identification of all costs, including estimated man-hours and printing, publishing and material expenditures, arising from mandates contained in resolutions other than the annual resolution of the General Assembly as recommended by the Committee on Information;

30. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session, in 1997, and to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, in 1997, on the activities of the Department of Public Information and on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the present resolution;

31. Decides that the next session of the Committee on Information should last no more than ten working days, and requests the Bureau of the Committee to explore ways and means of making optimum use of the Committee's time;

32. Requests the Committee on Information to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session;

33. Decides to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-second session the item entitled "Questions relating to information".

48. With reference to paragraph 29 of draft resolution B, the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information explained that in accordance with the established procedures and regulations of the United Nations, any request for activities additional to those for which funds were allocated in the regular budget, would be subject to a statement of financial implications. Such a statement should be provided to the General Assembly and the relevant bodies. Upon the request of several delegations, this clarification is therefore reflected in the present report of the Committee on Information to the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/35/21), annex, sect. V.

2/ Ibid., Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/36/21); ibid., Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/37/21 and Corr.1); ibid., Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/38/21 and Corr.1 and 2); ibid., Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/39/21); ibid., Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/40/21); ibid., Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/41/21); ibid., Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/42/21); ibid., Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/43/21); ibid., Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/44/21); ibid., Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/45/21); ibid., Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/46/21); ibid., Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/47/21); ibid., Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/48/21); ibid., Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/49/21).

3/ Ibid., Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/50/21).

4/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first session, Supplement No. 21 (A/51/21).

5/ See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Records of the General Conference, Twenty-first Session, Belgrade, 23 September to 28 October 1980, vol. I, Resolutions, sect. III.4, resolution 4/21.

6/ A/AC.198/1996/3.

7/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/42/21), chap. III.D, recommendation 36.

8/ A/AC.198/1995/5.

9/ A/AC.198/1996/2.

ANNEX I

Statement by the Chairman of the Committee on Information at the opening of the eighteenth session

I am honoured to again chair this distinguished Committee as we continue our important review of the information questions before the United Nations and the Department of Public Information's policies and activities. It pleases me greatly to see the familiar faces of colleagues and friends around this room, and to welcome those who are joining us for the first time. I feel certain that we will continue our work together in a spirit of cooperation and goodwill. I thank you for your continued trust and confidence in me and assure this Committee that I shall be guided by your collective wisdom in the course of our upcoming deliberations.

I am pleased to personally welcome the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to membership in the Committee and feel certain that its interest and participation will further enhance the work and standing of this important Committee.

I would again like to congratulate the newly elected members of the Bureau, with whom I look forward to working. May I also take this opportunity to recognize Mr. Alejandro Nieto of Argentina and Mr. Minhaj Barna of Pakistan, our outgoing Vice-Chairmen, as well as our former Rapporteur, Mr. Fateh Zeghib of Algeria, for all of their hard work and dedication in the work of the Committee.

I wish to assure members of the Committee that our Bureau, in accordance with your recommendations, has met regularly during the course of the past year in inter-sessional meetings to work with the management of the Department of Public Information both to strengthen our ongoing dialogue and to implement the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 50/31 A and B. In this connection, I would like to mention to you that we have discussed, for example, the measures to be taken by the Department in response to the ongoing structural and financial reform of the United Nations; its many activities in connection with important events, such as the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing; and the Department's close cooperation with its United Nations agency partners, as well as its interdepartmental coordination and cooperation on peace-keeping and other important issues.

At this juncture, I would like to extend my highest appreciation to our friend, Mr. Samir Sanbar, Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information, for his willingness to meet with us and to speak openly and frankly, so that together we can strengthen the Department and heighten its effectiveness to spread the Organization's message. His experienced leadership is recognized and valued by all of us here today.

A very relevant illustration of the inter-sessional work of the Extended Bureau of the Committee was the recent visit to the United Nations Information Centre in Washington, D.C. We were graciously hosted by the Department of Public Information Director there, Mr. Joe Sills, whom we all know well from his days as Spokesman of the Secretary-General, and his very capable staff. The trip was extremely informative, interesting and useful for us all.

Never before has our work and the work of the Department been so important. In the present climate calling for broad reform of the United Nations, with

resulting far-reaching cuts and financial stringency, the output of the Department of Information has to be better than ever. Its materials and services must be of the highest quality, and be cost-effective, properly targeted and disseminated through the most up-to-date means of technology. We must work together with the understanding that our decisions affect not only the direction of the Department, but also the very image of the Organization in these difficult times.

I believe that the Department of Public Information will rise to the challenges ahead. Indeed, it was already hard at work, before this latest worsening financial crisis. The Department, under Mr. Sanbar's leadership, has over the past several years undertaken new initiatives and explored innovative approaches and partnerships in developing a public information strategy to increase its outreach to audiences worldwide. In this context, I think it is worth mentioning that the Department of Public Information is well ahead of other departments in reaching the goal of gender balance, which in my opinion is very positive and indicative of its attitude towards genuine reform.

As you know, the General Assembly in resolution 50/31 B requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Committee several reports, which are now before us and which reflect the Department's new direction. The first, contained in document A/AC.198/1996/2, describes the intensified promotional activities of the United Nations information centres in the fiftieth anniversary year and provides details on the integration process, the enhancement of the centres and their financial resources. The second report, contained in document A/AC.198/1996/3, gives a detailed account of the Department's publishing activities and reviews its recurrent and non-recurrent publications. It highlights new directions, including the enhancement of sales, marketing and external outreach, the increased use of internal printing capacity and the utilization of electronic publishing opportunities.

In addition, as you are aware, in paragraph 22 of resolution 50/31 B, the General Assembly invited Member States to submit their observations and suggestions to the Secretary-General on ways and means of furthering the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries. I must inform you that in response to this invitation, only two communications have been received. The Government of Austria has provided details of a project for which it has contributed funds to enhance transmission capabilities between the islands of Cape Verde via an optical fibre network. The Government of Indonesia in its communication stresses the importance of overcoming imbalances in the availability of information technologies. In this context, the Government highlights proposals and support measures it has advanced within the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and important regional organizations. The two important communications by the Governments of Austria and Indonesia are, of course, available to delegations.

The challenge of the United Nations lies in its ability to communicate and convince. We should all be aware of how difficult is the task of the Department of Public Information in this world of competing information priorities, especially now in a critical time of organizational reform and financial constraints. But I wish to assure the management of the Department of Public Information of this Committee's continued commitment to providing the necessary guidance and support for its activities.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my intention to work closely with the Bureau and the management of the Department of Public Information, as well as with all the members of this Committee to further promote a spirit of teamwork in the fulfilment of our mandate. I look forward to a productive exchange of views in these next two weeks. I feel certain that with hard work and dedication, this Committee shall progress even further in strengthening our consensus and producing workable, action-oriented recommendations which will respond appropriately to the new realities and requirements facing this Organization.

ANNEX II

Statement by the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information at the opening of the eighteenth session of the Committee on Information

It is my unique privilege and honour to welcome all of you on behalf of the Secretary-General to the eighteenth session of the Committee on Information. In connection with the General Assembly's decision to increase the membership of this Committee from 88 to 89, I wish to extend a warm welcome to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as the new member of the Committee. I wish to welcome also the new Vice-Chairmen from the Asian Group and the Latin American and Caribbean Group of States, as well as the new Rapporteur from the African Group.

May I also personally welcome you, Mr. Chairman. With your wealth of experience and background of active participation in the work of this Committee, I am sure that the Department will benefit from your strong support and valuable leadership. I wish to assure you and all the members of the Committee of my commitment and that of my staff, to giving you the necessary assistance for an effective and successful session. In return, we hope to receive your guidance for the future direction of our work in order to better address the Organization's public information needs in today's rapidly changing international environment, and in a climate of shrinking budgetary resources.

We meet at an especially challenging period in the history of the United Nations. The strengthened role of the Organization in development, in peace-keeping and peace-building, and in the promotion of democratic values, all at a time of revolutionary advances in information and communications technology, have attracted world attention to the United Nations as never before. I can assure you that the Department of Public Information has made every effort, within its terms of reference, to meet these challenges, and to satisfy an ever increasing demand for information about the United Nations at work. The surge in media and public interest during the fiftieth anniversary resulted in the Department's tripling its production of backgrounders, fact-sheets, notes for speakers and special radio and television programmes, all of which were transmitted through pouch and electronic means to specific audiences worldwide. In 1994, for example, 1.3 million copies of publications and other documents were distributed to targeted audiences. By 1995, this number had increased to 4.4 million copies.

With the United Nations, as mandated by Member States and directed by the Secretary-General, moving to reassert the urgency and long-term importance of its work, the world needs a powerful reaffirmation of the linkage between peace and development. For this to happen, there must be dramatic improvement in public understanding of the United Nations and its work. Together with all of you in this room, I have no doubts that when the mission of the United Nations is understood and misperceptions and criticisms effectively addressed, the Organization will gain the universal support it deserves and very much needs. We are trying to bring the message of the United Nations to all corners of the world, in all languages of its Member States, first and foremost through the network of information centres and United Nations offices. Despite budgetary constraints, full use is, and will be, made to communicate the message of the Organization in its working languages, English and French.

We are all aware that we live in an age when political decisions can be influenced by the emotional power of visual images, whose instant, worldwide transmission has been made possible by rapid-fire advances in everything from satellite technology to personal computers. In every corner of the world, these technologies are helping to reshape economies and transform political landscapes. Cultures long isolated from other cultures are now part of a global village: a world of expanding interdependency, fuelled by a seemingly inexhaustible flow of information. The result is that while public interest in the United Nations is at an all-time high, the Organization and its message must vie for the public's attention as never before. In this fiercely competitive communications environment, the Department of Public Information is working to identify ways to sharpen the focus on current issues, to ensure the timeliness of its outputs and to maintain quality standards to reach the widest possible audience worldwide. To accomplish all this under the burden of budgetary limitations is the greatest challenge my Department faces.

Please allow me to provide some facts in this regard: for the first time in the Organization's history, the 1996-1997 programme budget proposal for the Department showed zero growth. Expenses have been cut further. The Department's budget for this biennium reflects a net negative growth rate of 3 per cent, including a 2 per cent reduction in regular budget posts. Additionally, in response to new reductions mandated by the General Assembly, the departmental budget has just been further reduced by about 5.5 per cent. The Department will have to operate with fewer resources; in fact we are already working with less, and we are doing more with less. But these severe budgetary restrictions have consequences. There is a limit, and we have now reached a point where the continuous erosion of resources is beginning to cut into the core programme of the Department, affecting programme delivery, its timeliness and its quality. Budgetary reductions are affecting print coverage of meetings; our multi-language radio programming; the UN Chronicle; background and reference publications in hard copy; the work of a number of information centres; and others.

In this connection, I should like to underscore the fact that the Department of Public Information is among those United Nations departments with the greatest number of mandates and responsibilities for co-implementation of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its fiftieth session. There are more resolutions affecting the Department with specific and comprehensive public information mandates, than most other departments have, put together. In addition, there is also a growing proliferation of reports that the Department is regularly asked to submit. These include reports to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the Committee for Programme and Coordination, the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the Joint Inspection Unit, the Department of Administration and Management and others. All of this has placed a heavy burden on the Department, effectively doubling the workload of our staff at all levels in the performance of their professional public-information duties.

The Department of Public Information had begun taking innovative steps to ensure the cost-effective performance of our work even before the current financial crisis gripped the Organization. In other words, effective programme delivery has been our main objective, and our financial savings represent a bonus. Cost-effectiveness, I can assure you, has been the key to the strengthening and successful delivery of the Department's information programme.

The Department's achievements over the past year have included:

- Extending our reach to key audiences with a multiplier effect such as educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, think-tanks, the business community and governmental institutions at national and local levels;

- Forging strong partnerships with media organizations worldwide, particularly in the field of broadcasting;

- Harnessing advanced information technologies for the production and the delivery of public information programmes;

- Establishing new levels of departmental and inter-agency cooperation, particularly through the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC), which I chair, to sharpen the focus on issues that speak to people's needs;

- Introducing a series of far-reaching management initiatives that have made the Department a more streamlined and functionally better integrated operation.

We have set up, as many of you know, a United Nations Home Page on the World Wide Web of the Internet to offer comprehensive information about the Organization and its work to a wider audience. With the technical backstopping of the Electronic Services Division, the Department last year took on the responsibility of coordinating the United Nations material on the World Wide Web; we not only redesigned the home page, but, more importantly, have created an organizational structure for posting information and are advising other departments and offices on their "presence" on the Web. We are moving to make optimum use of this cost-effective medium. A major effort is currently under way to develop this electronic window of the United Nations further, by the same-day posting, on the Web, of our publications, press releases and important documents. Drawing on our human resources in various divisions, I have therefore, only last week, established a special Unit for this purpose under my personal supervision. This managerial initiative will help us reach our audiences instantaneously with United Nations publications, with reference material and with daily news about the Organization. And we want to do this in various languages. Electronic dissemination of information, at a rate calculated at 16,000 retrievals per day, is also helping us to reduce the print runs of our materials. Work is also now under way to offer selected publications for sale via the Internet.

Starting in February of this year, the Department has set up an institutionalized mechanism to strengthen our capacity to generate fair coverage of the Organization and to ensure a rapid response to inaccuracies in media reporting. Subsequent to the recommendations of a standing working group, which I convened and which is coordinating its activities with senior United Nations officials, a number of outreach activities are being initiated and materials widely distributed. Monthly updates of fact-sheets that seek to correct common misperceptions conveyed in the media are in preparation. They are being made available on the World Wide Web and are being widely disseminated in local languages by United Nations information centres. As you may have noted, efforts are also under way to place op-ed pieces and other readily accessible materials in the media.

Since 1991, there have been four regional seminars on promoting pluralistic and independent media sponsored by the Department and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The latest, which I

was privileged to attend in January, took place in Sana'a, bringing together some 150 Arab journalists, media owners, representatives of regional press organizations and media experts. It ended successfully with the adoption of a Declaration containing recommendations to promote freedom of the press, pluralism and diversity in the media of the Arab countries.

The Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General is the focal point for journalists covering the United Nations, for information on the work of the Secretary-General in particular and about the Organization in general. The Spokesman meets the Secretary-General daily for guidance and to brief him on media trends. The Spokesman also attends weekly task-force meetings and others with senior Secretariat staff, to keep abreast of political and operational developments. Despite an acute shortage of resources, the Office of the Spokesman has never been as active as it is today. The Spokesman conducts the daily noon briefing for correspondents, followed by a similar briefing for press officers of the missions. The audio of the noon briefing is available to United Nations offices around the world, to permanent missions in New York, as well as on the Radio Bulletin Board. The Office of the Spokesman is involved in the planning and organization of the Secretary-General's media-related activities, including interviews at Headquarters and during his travels.

One of the positive results of controversy about the United Nations and its role is the emergence of effective spokesmen for the United Nations among members of permanent delegations. Ambassadors of Member States, at the major conferences in Copenhagen or in Beijing, at Headquarters or in the field, have demonstrated a solid commitment to the Organization. These efforts, reflected in many cases clearly and effectively by the media, constitute an encouraging development for which my Department extends its full cooperation.

Public information on global development issues remains a top priority. The cycle of United Nations conferences of this decade - from human rights to population, from social development to the advancement of women - has produced a legacy of priority issues for continuing the Department follow-up activities. The Department has been an active participant in the inter-agency meetings on women and will be a partner in the system-wide publications plan. As a follow-up to the Social Summit, the Department helped to launch the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty in December 1995. It has convened several informal JUNIC task-force meetings on the Year to ensure that all concerned agencies are informed of each other's initiatives and to plan how joint activities can best be realized. Currently, the Department is in the final phase of preparations for the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), to be held in Istanbul in June 1996. In addition to the production of radio and television programmes, press kits and brochures, we have produced an inter-agency exhibit for display at the conference site.

Earlier this year, the Department actively contributed to the preparations for the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly on public administration and development, held in New York from 15 to 19 April. The Department publicized and promoted the issues related to the needs of efficient public administration. In advance of the special session, United Nations information centres and services in different regions helped to promote awareness of the United Nations preparatory meetings that addressed different aspects of public administration, development and good governance.

Our public information initiatives regarding international peace and security are proceeding along three parallel tracks: ensuring a coordinated approach to public information relating to individual peace-keeping and other

field operations; improving our capacity to reach wider audiences with information about the United Nations role in promoting and maintaining international peace and security; and communicating the message that our peacemaking and peace-keeping efforts must be complemented by international support for efforts aimed at post-conflict reconstruction.

The Department continues to spotlight human rights issues, from children's rights, the independence of the judiciary, and women and violence to the Decade on Human Rights Education and the rights of indigenous people. A journalist encounter focusing on human rights is planned for later this year, at Headquarters. The Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination has prompted special radio and TV programmes as well as print products and special activities by United Nations information centres and services.

A year ago, I informed the Committee that the Department was exploring the development of an interdepartmental consultative mechanism to coordinate our approach to public information in peace-keeping and other field missions. I am pleased to report that this mechanism is now fully operational. Senior officials of the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peace-keeping Operations and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs are participating in an interdepartmental working group on public information for peace-keeping and other field missions that was established upon the Department's initiative. This group has adopted guidelines on public information aspects of field missions. Its work has produced tangible progress towards more coordinated public-information strategies for the field, beginning with the development of standard operating procedures. Working-level meetings of the group have resulted in recommendations on key technical and policy questions, such as the staffing and budgetary requirements for information components in the field, and on radio broadcasting options for the Organization in several mission areas.

As far as print materials on peace-keeping are concerned, completion of The Blue Helmets is one of the Department's immediate tasks. The Department continues to publish other materials on peace-keeping, such as the recent update of the Department map and background note on peace-keeping and reference papers on specific missions. In an effort to be more cost-effective, the Department is trimming its print outputs devoted to peace-keeping and making better use of electronic means for updating and disseminating information materials.

The Department's Cartographic Section, whose products and services are widely used by other departments and agencies, has undertaken new efforts to enhance its digital mapping capability to provide quick and effective cartographic support to peace-keeping and humanitarian operations. The aim is to improve the multi-user functionality of its products and to provide quick and effective cartographic support to peace-keeping and humanitarian operations.

During the month of May, the Department will participate in an on-line forum produced by The New York Times featuring a portfolio of pictures by a photojournalist from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Terminals will be set up at designated points at Headquarters to allow NGO representatives to participate in a discussion of the issues, along with Internet users worldwide. Other locations will include Sarajevo and The Hague.

Collaboration continues between the Department and the Centre for Disarmament Affairs and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). With the Centre, the Department has produced and disseminated widely an updated brochure on the Chemical Weapons Convention. Particularly worth

noting are recent media events organized by UNIS Geneva in collaboration with UNIDIR to highlight the United Nations role in nuclear disarmament.

In cooperation with the permanent missions to the United Nations of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, tne Department of Public Information organized a programme of special events to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. On 26 April, the day of the anniversary, the Department provided press coverage for the commemorative meeting on Chernobyl and assisted in press conferences. It organized a special briefing for NGOs, art exhibits, a documentary film screening and a memorial concert. The Department also provided radio, TV and print coverage of the anniversary event and produced a special radio programme, "Chernobyl: Ten Years After". In addition, the United Nations TV series "World Chronicle" will feature a panel discussion devoted to the tenth anniversary.

The rapidly changing political situation in the Middle East has compelled the Department to approach its activities on the question of Palestine with the needed flexibility, as required by General Assembly resolution 84 C of 15 December 1995, and to keep its special information programme on the question under constant review. It is with these concerns in mind that the Department has engaged in consultations with the concerned parties to assess the advisability of holding in Gaza, at an opportune time in 1996, an international encounter for journalists on the question of Palestine. The Department has also embarked on organizing in the fall of 1996 a new training programme for Palestinian media practitioners, along the lines of the successful programme completed by the Department in the fall of 1995.

Similarly, in the light of the strong commitment of the United Nations to the African continent, the Department, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), participated in the launch of the United Nations system-wide Special Initiative on Africa. With the active involvement of the Department, a live satellite-link was set up so that the Secretary-General, the President of the World Bank and the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) could jointly launch the Initiative.

The United Nations information centres are the link of the United Nations with its audiences away from Headquarters. They are not news agencies. Their role is to encourage, to stimulate and to service the media, but not to compete with them. The activities of the centres are highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General before this Committee. At a time when it is fashionable for some to generalize about United Nations information centres and even to question their continued existence, I do not hesitate to come to their defence. They are modestly staffed offices with very meagre resources, but they play a role of immeasurable importance in keeping the public informed. They are not glamorous outposts where bureaucrats dwell, but are rather offices where devoted staff work long and hard, under often trying conditions, sometimes at risk of their lives, like our colleague Onassini Lahrache, who was killed at his duty station in Algiers.

Nowadays, information is more than just facts on a piece of paper or images on a screen: it is becoming the tool for action and political engagement. As the Secretary-General has repeatedly pointed out, we are witnessing the exertion of greater influence on global affairs by an expanding array of parliamentarians, regional organizations, academia, transnational corporations and the media. For the United Nations, this means that our challenge lies in raising the awareness of these new actors and engaging their cooperation and support for the ideals embodied in the Charter of the United Nations. The role

of the information centres in this regard is crucial. They are far from passive bystanders handing out press releases and flyers; rather, they are active partners for many at local and regional levels.

We are constantly reviewing the performance of each centre. We are not always fully satisfied, but the centres must often cope with greater demands - not only by DPI - than they can fulfil. And their performance varies with the leadership of the director and local staffing; this is the human factor. Nevertheless, we are trying our best to ensure cost-effectiveness, and reassessments are constantly made to identify and assist those centres with proven need for better action and performance.

In the past when operational funds for the information centres were reduced, we appealed to the staff to use resourcefulness and creativity. This year, the funds allocated to the information centres were cut more drastically than ever before. Resourcefulness and creativity are laudable qualities, but they can only go so far. By cutting the funds to such a degree, we stifle the potential value of the information centres. Indeed, we threaten the very thing that most sustains the United Nations: a well-informed public.

I must draw the attention of the Committee to a serious matter that the Department faces regarding a number of information centres, which were established and operated entirely on host government funds. I have alerted the concerned Governments and urged them to fulfil their financial obligations urgently in order to avert the closure of these centres. The Department has no other alternative. Under United Nations financial rules and regulations, we are not permitted to redeploy funds from the regular budget in order to fund extrabudgetary posts. A number of UNICs have extrabudgetary posts to supplement their few established regular budget posts. However, in some cases, the level of the annual contribution does not meet the full cost of these posts. It is expected that the staffing level of those centres would be proportionately cut in order to avoid a budget deficit. In this connection, I wish to express our gratitude to all those host Governments that have continued over the years to make their contributions to the operation of the information centres in a consistent and timely manner and to urge those who have not done so to fulfil their financial commitment.

Since 1993, when the process of integration between the United Nations information centres and UNDP offices began, the Department of Public Information, in consultation with UNDP, has continued its efforts to proceed with this exercise on a case-by-case basis. As mandated by the General Assembly, we are guided in our efforts by the principles and the conditions that are a prerequisite for any meaningful and successful integration: the views of the host Governments, the functional autonomy and the effectiveness of the information centres and the imperative that integration should realize savings in the costs of common offices and services. While we can point to successful cases under the integration agreement, we must also acknowledge that much is left to be desired in other cases. I can assure you that in all cases the Department has, in good faith, lived up to its commitments under the agreements. Although integration has been achieved administratively, we need to consolidate it professionally. In every host country, success depends upon the Acting Director and UNDP Resident Coordinator, as well as on the national officers. We have proposed more training for national officers on United Nations requirements, and systematic briefings for the Acting Directors who will benefit from that when taking up their tasks in complying with public information mandates.

Recognizing that the Organization's relations with non-governmental organizations represent an effective partnership, the Department continues to strengthen its cooperation with these groups to create a better understanding of the work of the United Nations in peace-keeping, peacemaking and the humanitarian, economic and social fields. The NGOs and hundreds of thousands of their affiliates assist the Organization in building bridges that link decisions taken at the intergovernmental level to action at the grass-roots level. NGOs accredited to the Department are briefed regularly on the current situation of the United Nations and on priorities for the Organization, and are provided with information and materials to encourage them to initiate their own outreach activities.

At the same time, the general public continues to visit United Nations Headquarters at the rate of 2,000 to 3,000 a day. By the close of the fiftieth anniversary year, some 35 million visitors had taken the guided tour since the service began. Stops on the tour route that were temporarily off-limits, such as the Security Council and the Trusteeship Council chambers, have been restored. However, security considerations have required reducing the number of visitors per group by 40 per cent. As a result, although there is heightened interest in the guided tours, difficulties are often experienced in accommodating such requests because of a reduced capacity to handle the volume of visitors seeking to take the tour. A considerable number of people wishing to take the tour have had to be turned away. And all this has had a devastating impact on the finances of guided tour operations. None the less, the Department intends to upgrade areas of public access, as well as to incorporate a full schedule of exhibits in the Public Lobby for 1996 using new technologies and computer graphics, and drawing on the UN50 Trust Fund or other possible sources of financing. The current display in the Public Lobby, an interactive exhibit on the disastrous effects of land-mines, is only the latest example of the potential for educational outreach on vital issues.

Easy-to-read booklets in question-and-answer format, such as The Charter at Your Fingertips, have been well received by academic institutions, NGOs and the public at large. A follow-up publication entitled The Role of the Secretary-General at Your Fingertips will be released later this year.

As part of its public outreach activities, the United Nations Speakers' Bureau is faced with unprecedented requests for special briefing programmes, often combined with a guided tour, from such organizations as: the United States Army War College, the Lester Pearson Peace-keeping Training Institute, Columbia University, Lions Clubs International, United Nations Associations from around the world and the national High School and College Model United Nations Conferences, to name a few. The Department's pursuit of building partnerships has led to a discussion of a collaborative effort with the United Nations Association of the United States to enhance the impact of the Speakers' Bureau and to share resources and information materials whenever such briefing programmes are organized, particularly outside Headquarters.

In February, the Department of Public Information joined forces with Turner Educational Services to coordinate an "electronic field trip" to the United Nations. A live teleconference over two days was beamed to hundreds of schools across the United States, including a series of live on-line "chats" with students and teachers, conducted with the assistance of the Public Broadcasting System. At the same time, we are exploring the possibility of additional ventures through closer contacts with professional educational organizations.

For five decades, United Nations Radio has served as a medium of information, education and promotion on issues of international interest and concern. In a global communication environment of competing priorities and agendas, the United Nations must have its voice. This is also the message brought home by United Nations peace-keepers. They have seen the power of radio to guide, to assure and to educate people in Cambodia during the successful mission of the United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). They have also seen how, through the power of radio, hate campaigns have been mounted in Rwanda by a certain radio station, leading to the murder of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. The need for the development of a credible and effective medium of mass communication has never been greater. In 1995, United Nations Radio produced and disseminated more than 3,500 documentaries and news updates in 15 languages - a total of 505 broadcast hours. This output was rebroadcast by an estimated 1,600 broadcasting organizations worldwide.

The General Assembly has recognized the great potential of radio in its resolution 49/38 B of 9 December 1994 encouraging us "to explore ways and means to improve the access of United Nations radio to airwaves worldwide". This call has put the Department on a new course to review its radio operations. In pursuance of that resolution, the Department has set out to explore practical steps to develop a United Nations radio broadcasting capability.

In planning this project, we are keenly aware of the prevailing environment of efficiency gain and cost-effectiveness. Staff and production resources are being reviewed and restructured to develop a sustainable programme schedule. The Department's approach is predicated on the following:

- Achieving greater efficiency and productivity by streamlining resources and by adopting more advanced production practices and technologies;

- Releasing part of the resources allocated to the current patterns of production and dissemination to partially offset transmission cost;

- Seeking support from partners in the common system, as well as external support from Member States, organizations and relevant institutions in the communication and broadcast industries.

This new venture by the Department will maintain regional balance in programme production while ensuring cost-effectiveness and wider outreach.

The United Nations Radio Information System, which is available by telephone 24 hours a day, has been further expanded with the addition of the twice-weekly press briefings from Geneva. Reports on late meetings of the Security Council are available with taped excerpts within 30 minutes of the close of the meeting. The Daily Highlights are ..ow being posted directly onto the United Nations Home Page and can be accessed by any Internet user, anywhere in the world, within one hour after they have been posted. Missions with access to the Internet can view the Highlights directly from their own computers. This service is coded and transferred to the server by 6 p.m. daily. But despite all these efforts, the Radio Service of the Department is suffering from the freeze on posts and declining resources. As a result, the long-standing regional and linguistic balances it has always maintained are in real jeopardy.

The expanding usage of the video and TV productions of the Department of Public Information is proof of a new quality achieved in our working relations with an important sector of the media. Over 1,200 TV news packages were

produced in 1995 and sold to broadcasting organizations and TV news syndicators with worldwide distribution. The Department's TV production "Year in Review" reached as many as 360 million households via satellite broadcast in six languages. The audience for the news magazine "United Nations in Action" is estimated at 160 million viewers per week, both through CNN worldwide and through DPI distributions in English or with Arabic, French, Russian or Spanish adaptation, to broadcasters in 106 countries. Each of the three-minute weekly episodes deals with one issue on the United Nations agenda, such as humanitarian affairs, environment, social and economic development, refugees and peace-keeping, and shows how the Organization deals these global issues.

According to the findings of a comprehensive internal study on the series, 46 per cent of the television stations air the programme on prime-time newscasts; 70 per cent of the broadcasters would air more episodes if produced; and 76 per cent of viewers approached indicated that the programmes contributed significantly to their understanding of the work of the United Nations. The internal evaluation study on "United Nations in Action" is an example of the Department's commitment to regular internal evaluation to ascertain effectiveness, usefulness and timeliness of our information products and activities. I firmly believe that constant evaluation to obtain feedback on our products and activities is a key mechanism that allows the Department to review its programme strategies, avoid duplication and sharpen its focus on targeted audiences worldwide.

The Department maintains a modest though very effective production of 30-minute videos. One of the most recently released videos, titled "A Place to Stand", was chosen from among several thousand entrants to win three major awards at international film festivals. "A Place to Stand" is on television programmes in many countries. In addition to producing "United Nations in Action", the series "World Chronicle", as well as various feature documentaries and TV spots, DPI has collaborated with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs to prepare the videotape "Land-mines: The Global Crisis", which is currently being shown in the Public Lobby's exhibit on the subject.

Coverage of intergovernmental meetings is an important part of the daily work of the Department. I share the concern of the Committee that this service should be maintained at highly professional standards, both in English and French. Today, I must bring to your attention that the capacity of this service, especially its ability to produce press releases on the whole range of meetings at Headquarters and other United Nations sites, has been seriously affected by the current financial crisis. This is attributable to the fact that coverage of meetings is largely dependent on temporary assistance funds - an area that has been particularly hard hit by budgetary cutbacks. We find this development most unfortunate, as DPI's meetings coverage has long been regarded as indispensable by correspondents, delegations and Secretariat officials alike. Press releases constitute the only immediately available written news source on the proceedings of United Nations meetings.

The Committee has before it a report of the Secretary-General on the review of the publications of the Department of Public Information. One of the principal new requirements of the Department's publications on which we have focused since 1994 is that they provide authoritative information presented in a style, format and design that will make them, wherever feasible, more saleable. This is being done through concentrating particularly on comprehensive information on United Nations actions, and through utilization of reader feedback and sales analysis. The latter has been facilitated by the decision

last year to move the Sales and Marketing Section to the Department of Public Information from the Office of Conference and Support Services. Its operations achieved record sales revenues in 1995, including a 44 per cent increase in revenues for the Bookstore. Since joining the Department, the Section has undertaken a mailing of 50,000 copies of the publications catalogue to potential customers around the world, and special mailings to promote publications of special interest to our audiences: the Statistical Yearbook and the United Nations Women's Indicators and Statistics Microcomputer Database (WISTAT) on CD-ROM, publications related to the Law of the Sea Convention, to the advancement of women and to the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations.

An excellent example of what has been achieved in the publications area is the Blue Books Series: nine titles have been produced in just over a year, ranging from The United Nations and Apartheid to The United Nations and the Iraq-Kuwait Conflict. The series has established itself as an invaluable tool for researchers. The Blue Books have also significantly expanded the Secretariat's link to the academic and policy-proposing community, both key players in influencing opinion worldwide. As has been observed, any Government or publishing house would be proud of such a high level of quality output. Reflecting this success is the fact that over 10,000 copies have already been sold.

In addition, given the fact that the bulk of the United Nations Secretariat's publications are produced by departments other than the Department of Public Information, the Publications Board - which I chair - has focused more sharply on applying established criteria for determining their relevance and quality to their markets and audiences before a decision to publish is made. We have also enhanced the level of design and production coordination services which the Department provides with regard to publications to the entire Secretariat.

All publishing units have nearly completed their move to a common desk-top publishing platform, which combines speed of production with a capacity for a high-quality, cost-efficient output. This move will increase productivity and timeliness. The 1995 edition of the World Media Handbook is a good example of a high-quality publication whose production process - from database maintenance and desktop composition to cover design and printing - has been accomplished internally in a cost-effective manner. However, while the Department is proud to have pioneered the use of many aspects of electronic communication within the Organization, I must mention that the current financial cutbacks are inevitably going to retard the progress being made. Similarly, while we are making much more use of our internal printing facilities, resource constraints there are either causing delays in publications or forcing products to be routed back to external printing.

Changes are under way at the UN Chronicle, the Organization's flagship publication. Each issue will now be more up to date and will include coverage of events that occur up to three weeks before press time. I regret to say, however, that the financial crisis has compelled us to temporarily suspend the Chronicle's Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish editions.

The Dag Hammarskjöld Library continues to play a vital role as the primary research facility for the Organization. Information professionals track, sort, index and disseminate the massive amount of available information in order to facilitate research for its users. New technology has significantly improved ongoing efforts to make more readily available the vast amount of information and research material on hand in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. The number of

reference queries answered are constantly rising, reaching more than 85,000 in 1995. The amount of information available through databases and CD-ROMs is rapidly expanding and has enabled the Library to provide its users with electronic dissemination of the following: full-text or bibliographic information from on-line databases, electronic journals and government and research publications available in the public domain via the Internet.

The Dag Hammarskjöld Library manages a network of depository libraries that make United Nations documents and publications available free of charge to users around the world. There are 351 depository libraries in 142 countries. The Library also provides direct electronic access to the United Nations Bibliographic Information System (UNBIS). In 1995, 47,800 records were added to the UNBIS database files, with over 200 users accessing the system more than 67,000 times.

UNBIS Plus on CD-ROM continues to be published quarterly. In 1996, after its publisher recovers its software development costs, the Organization can expect to realize royalty income from this product. In the period since its first publication in mid-1994 through December 1995, over 100 copies of the three-disc retrospective and current files set have been sold and billed for gross sales of over US$ 300,000. Recent bibliographies enthusiastically received by library users include "United Nations 1945-1995: United Nations Reform, Charter and Security Council".

The Dag Hammarskjöld Library continued to provide regular training programmes and workshops to Secretariat and mission staff, as well as to librarians from depository libraries, in order to facilitate their research through the Library's on-line databases and other information resources. In 1995, the Library organized 20 workshops.

Communication and public information are crucial parts of society's life-support system. In dealing with the world media, therefore, the United Nations must address practical ways of pooling its expertise and resources to communicate a strong, unified image of the Organization, taking advantage of the latest technology. It must develop a concerted approach to crucial areas of concern, such as better illuminating the role of the United Nations in marshalling collective responses to global problems, and addressing distorted public perceptions of the Organization's effectiveness in dealing with the issues that concern the peoples of the world. All of this must be accomplished despite structural and budgetary limitations on the Organization at a time when the influence of electronic media on international policy and decision-making is on the rise. The sheer volume and diversity of information now available worldwide make it absolutely essential that the Department's output not only be of the highest quality but be presented in such a way that its relevance to peoples' lives stands out in a crowded field.

This task is our common task, and this is where we work together, be it through the Extended Bureau of the Committee on Information or through the many individual consultations with the delegations of Member States. As we all know, modern information and communications technologies are no guarantee of improved international relations. But used effectively, they can enhance the possibility of a more just, secure and peaceful world.

In the new era of communication, speed is of the essence - and modern technology is its backbone. The Department of Public Information has long recognized that the timely dissemination of information material is crucial, and that misperceptions and misinformation must be countered swiftly. And so we

will redouble our efforts to spread the message of the United Nations in the most cost-effective way. For this, we need your continued participation and constant support.